

4 April 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Factors Influencing Hanoi's Behavior at the Paris
Negotiations

1. The Communist View of Negotiations. Hanoi is certainly interested in using the Paris talks to explore seriously the possibilities of achieving a Vietnam settlement. To Communists generally, however, and to the Hanoi Politburo in particular, negotiations with non-Communist governments are fronts of revolutionary struggle as well as vehicles for settling disputes. Thus Hanoi is also anxious to exploit the Paris talks, the fact of their existence, and the manner of their conduct to exacerbate tensions between Washington and Saigon and to affect the political climate in South Vietnam, in the United States and in the world at large in a manner that facilitates the achievement of Hanoi's political objectives. Hanoi is almost certainly not yet prepared to accept any negotiated settlement that does not, at a minimum, provide for a withdrawal of all US (and allied) forces and guarantee the Viet Cong movement a political (and, possibly, territorial) base adequate to give the Viet Cong a fairly clear shot at achieving political control over South Vietnam.

2. The Principal Determinants of Hanoi's Negotiating Position. The statements made and proposals tendered in Paris by US and GVN negotiators in the open talks or, particularly, in private sessions will certainly be weighed carefully in Hanoi. Such allied remarks or proposals, however, will be but one of the factors influencing Hanoi's overall negotiating posture. In general terms, this posture will always be dictated by -- and, indeed, constitute a reflection of -- Hanoi's overall assessment of the total Vietnam situation. The principal short run determinants of this overall assessment probably are, and will remain, Hanoi's calculation of Communist military prospects in South Vietnam, its evaluation of the political situation in Vietnam (including the state of US/GVN relations) and, particularly, its estimate of the political climate in the United States and the impact of this climate on the policies and resolution of the US Government.

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3. At the same time, Hanoi almost certainly is weighing the costs of prolonging the conflict against the gains likely to be achieved by this course. These costs include heavy combat losses and physical and psychological strains on the population in the north, and the weakening of ideological discipline under the pressures of the war. While none of these problems is of such magnitude as to force Hanoi to terminate the war, they will almost certainly influence Hanoi's willingness to prolong the struggle in the absence of good prospects for success within a reasonable period of time. Furthermore, Hanoi is probably concerned over its ability to withstand the weight of its Chinese neighbor over the longer term if its own population continues to suffer the loss of its most vigorous generation in combat.

4. Hanoi is probably now reviewing the bidding on the Communists' current phase of military activity in South Vietnam (the offensive that began on 23 February). Hanoi is probably satisfied that its forces have given an adequate demonstration of Communist abilities to maintain military pressures in South Vietnam over an extended period of time. The Saigon Government is displaying a degree of toughness, flexibility and cohesion. Hanoi probably finds disquieting, but Hanoi almost certainly still believes the GVN is vulnerable to various kinds of military, political and diplomatic pressure and, further, that by political and military action the Communists can prevent the GVN from improving its position significantly in the near term future. The new US administration is clearly proving to be more "stubborn" than Hanoi had hoped would be the case and more obtusely reluctant to draw the "correct" conclusion that the Vietnam war is inherently unwinnable and, hence, the US should disengage forthwith. Nonetheless, Hanoi apparently calculates (or, at least, hopes) that President Nixon's grace period is rapidly drawing to a close and if Hanoi's negotiators stone-wall a little longer, the US will be under mounting domestic political pressure to make the gestures necessary to get the Paris talks moving. Hanoi is not likely to show much forthcoming flexibility in Paris unless or until there is some basic change in its overall assessment of the major ingredients of the total Vietnam situation.

5. One other factor almost certainly exerting a significant influence on Hanoi's negotiating position is Hanoi's reading of the lesson of history. The Politburo members discussing and deciding Hanoi's current negotiation strategy are the same people who determined the Viet Minh's negotiating position in 1954. In Hanoi's eyes, the Vietnamese Communist Party was euchred at the 1954 Geneva conference. They settled for half of Vietnam without insisting on a guaranteed position and status for the Viet Minh

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movement in the south that would have given the Viet Minh a clear shot at political power. In effect, the Politburo took what (in 1954) seemed the almost no risk gamble of betting on a sure thing. The Politburo calculated -- along with virtually all knowledgeable observers, Communist and non-Communist alike -- that South Vietnam was certain to fall into the Communists' lap either via the 1956 elections* or through anarchy and socio-political collapse which would leave the Communists with the only effective, organized movement south of the 17th Parallel and, hence, enable them to take power almost by default.

6. The actual course of events in the years following the 1954 Geneva Accords confounded these confident predictions. Instead of collapsing, Diem's government not only survived but in its early years (1954-1957) grew progressively stronger. Diem successfully ignored the 1956 election deadline. Post-Geneva events -- including the effect of the withdrawal of the bulk of the Viet Minh forces to North Vietnam and the surprising effectiveness of the early Diem government -- left the Communists' southern organization in disarray and in serious danger of being wiped out. By early 1957, the Party Politburo had to face the decision of resuming the struggle or indefinitely postponing its ambition of gaining political control over the south. The Party opted for struggle; and now, more than a dozen years later, the struggle is still going on.

7. Two key and influential Politburo members -- Le Duan, now First Secretary of the Party, and Le Duc Tho, now Hanoi's senior negotiator -- were intimately and personally affected by the adverse impact of the 1954 settlement on the fortunes of the Party's southern organization. This southern organization was shattered in 1952 in the aftermath of an unsuccessful general offensive against the French prematurely launched by the Viet Minh's southern leader, Nguyen Binh, who was executed (on Politburo orders) for his blunder. Le Duan was sent south by the Politburo to repair the damage, with Le Duc Tho dispatched to serve as his deputy. Together these two organized the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and ran the southern organization during the remainder of the Franco-Viet

*Since the 1954 partition divided the country in a way that put the majority of the population under Communist (DRV) control, the Politburo calculated that with two years in which to organize its populace, it could almost certainly produce 99+ percent of the majority vote in any electoral contest and, hence, was bound to win. Diem's similar calculations led him to refuse to commit political suicide by participating in an electoral contest whose outcome was foreordained by the facts of demographic and political life.

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Minh war. There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that Le Duan remained in command in the South until late 1956 or early 1957, when he assumed first the function and then (some months later) the title of Party First Secretary in Hanoi. From this senior position, Le Duan was probably one of the most powerful and effective advocates of the policy of struggle.

8. The history outlined in the above three paragraphs is important because it unquestionably has a profound effect on Hanoi's current attitudes. In 1954, the Politburo took what seemed an almost riskless gamble -- and lost. Hanoi must recognize that the Thieu government of 1969 is much stronger in every respect than was Diem's government in 1954. Hanoi will almost certainly be unwilling to gamble again against odds clearly less favorable than those prevailing fifteen years ago. Hence Hanoi will probably be reluctant to accept any negotiated settlement in Paris that does not guarantee the Communists a firm political base in South Vietnam.

9. Hanoi's Negotiating Tactics. Hanoi's tactics in Paris appear to be grounded in the belief -- almost certainly still held, but probably rather less confidently so than was the case in May 1968 -- that the Communists can stonewall on major issues longer than Washington's negotiators can. The Hanoi estimate, probably seconded and supported by the Soviets, seems to be that political pressures in the United States, including internal and international public opinion, will induce allied concessions ("moves in the interests of peace") before changes in the Vietnam situation compel Hanoi to give ground on major matters of substance.

10. In concrete terms, Hanoi seems bent on avoiding insofar as is possible any positive commitments to specific performance on the Communist side. It also appears to be endeavoring to get the maximum return, in terms of allied actions, for any Communist "non-concessions" tendered. For example, Hanoi got a concrete allied action -- suspension of all bombing of the north -- in return for "understandings" (which Hanoi insists were not conditions) that the climate which permitted cessation of the bombing would be prejudiced if the GVN were not permitted to be present in Paris, if the major cities in South Vietnam were shelled, and if the DMZ's neutrality was violated. A GVN delegation is of course participating in Paris, but the DMZ has been violated and all major South Vietnamese cities have undergone some rocketing and shelling. Hanoi's present pitch, however, is that current Communist military activity in South Vietnam is a legitimate response to a late 1968/early 1969 allied "escalation" of effort in South Vietnam.

11. Allied Actions Likely to Affect Hanoi's Paris Behavior.
Hanoi's present position, and behavior, at Paris is unlikely to change materially unless or until there is some substantial shift in Hanoi's overall assessment of the total Vietnam situation. Signs of allied, particularly, US, eagerness or haste will be read by Hanoi as indications that the political heat is mounting in the Washington kitchen. Hanoi will be particularly alert to any hints of self-imposed US deadlines or phase schedules either announced or reasonably inferred from the public statements of US political leaders (especially key figures in the Executive Branch). Hanoi's assessment of the pressure it is under to offer serious compromises will be almost inversely proportional to its assessment of the pressure on the US Government.

12. On the other hand, developments which shake Hanoi's faith in its present overall view of the struggle are the ones most likely to prompt genuine Communist movement in Paris. Hanoi would find most disquieting any concrete indications that the US Government was politically prepared for and confident of its ability to sustain a long siege. Oversimplifying somewhat, the more the allies can project a credible image of prolonged patience, the greater will be the pressure felt in Hanoi to initiate movement.

13. Hanoi seems to be particularly nervous about, hence sensitive to, any indication of the evolution of bilateral US/GVN arrangements which would reduce the US role in the struggle without restricting the activity of allied forces or reducing the effectiveness of the overall allied effort. Hanoi's sharp reaction to developments in this field, or even discussion thereof, would appear to betray serious concern. Certainly the evolution of the Vietnam situation Hanoi would least welcome would be a progressive diminution of the US role worked out with the willing support of the GVN which did not adversely affect the military or political strength of the Saigon Government and was developed bilaterally between Saigon and Washington without reference (or concessions) to Communist concerns and interests. Should Hanoi see such a development actually in train, it would first attempt to initiate effective counter-action on the ground. Should its counter-action fail, Hanoi would probably feel itself strongly impelled to move in Paris to stop this process and work out a minimally favorable settlement before the Paris talks became irrelevant.

14. One other area of activity in which effective allied gambits are likely to improve Hanoi's Paris behavior is the field of propaganda initiative. One of Hanoi's principal current objectives is to tar the GVN as the primary

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VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF

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DATE: 5 Apr 69

TO: The Director

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT: Requested Memo

REMARKS:

Attached is the note on negotiations you asked for. The coordination process was longer and more involved than I had anticipated it would be (my colleagues were fractious and lacked proper respect for my prose). The paper here attached is a joint project blessed by all the brethren:

[redacted] (who gave me his proxy). It was not shown to Ambassador Thompson since, in discussing it with [redacted] [redacted] we felt additional paragraphs on the Soviets were not strictly germane to this exercise.

[redacted]
George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment